

L. PORTER DICKINSON

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

L. Porter Dickinson

(1906 -)

At the age of twenty-one, L. Porter Dickinson left his job with the Seattle Post-Intelligencer to accept a position in the classified advertising department of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin at a salary of twenty-five dollars a week.

Starting as one of two persons in that department in 1927, Mr. Dickinson worked his way up to national advertising, then became manager of the entire advertising department and, eventually, general manager of the Star-Bulletin. In 1962 he became president of the Hawaii Newspaper Agency, while continuing on as publisher of the Star-Bulletin.

Mr. Dickinson discusses his personal experiences, newspaper career and association with Riley H. Allen; and recalls the effects that World War II had on the publication of newspapers. He also describes Honolulu and the way of life in the early days.

Lynda Mair, Interviewer

© 1979 The Watumull Foundation, Oral History Project
2051 Young Street, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96826

All rights reserved. This transcript, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without the permission of the Watumull Foundation.

INTERVIEW WITH L. PORTER DICKINSON

At his Star-Bulletin office, 605 Kapiolani Boulevard, 96813

Late 1971

D: L. Porter Dickinson

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

M: I guess the place to begin is something about your background. I know that you were born in Glasgow, Kentucky.

D: That's right.

M: 1906?

D: Right.

M: And that's about as much as I know. And I have your parents' names from Men and Women [of Hawaii], edited by Gwen-fread E. Allen. Honolulu: Star-Bulletin Company, Inc., 1966. L. Porter Dickinson is the son of Michael Hall and Emma Raus Dickinson]. But one thing I'd like to know: is Glasgow a Scotch settlement? Is that the reason for the name?

D: No. I don't know where the name came from, but I'm sure it isn't a Scotch community. I don't know where the name originated.

M: Had your parents been there a long time?

D: Well, my family came from Virginia originally and moved to Kentucky. They left Kentucky when I was four years old and moved out to Seattle, Washington.

M: So you don't remember much about . . .

D: No, I don't. I've only been back there once just to visit relatives. I don't remember much about Kentucky.

But I grew up in Seattle and I came to Hawaii in 1927 to join the [Honolulu] Star-Bulletin at a fabulous salary of twenty-five dollars a week (Lynda laughs), which was pretty good in those days.

M: Yeh, that's really not too bad.

D: That was when the dollar was worth a little bit more than it is today.

I've thoroughly enjoyed every minute in Hawaii. I was glad I came. I arrived here almost on my 21st birthday. I've been with the Star-Bulletin going on forty-five years now--long time. It's been a great experience. I think anyone who came to Hawaii before the [Great] Depression really enjoyed living here and growing up with the city--and the state as a matter of fact.

M: It's changed so drastically.

D: I think anyone who came here before the airplane started got to know the islands pretty well, because we were almost forced to vacation on the Neighbor Islands or here [on Oahu]. We had to take our own cars on the boat running between the islands, but many people did that. We stayed in island hotels where they were available, or sometimes rented cottages, but we got to really investigate every road and every little district on each island. So we really got acquainted, not by choice but because we had nothing else to do. (chuckles) We didn't have the time to go to the mainland by ship. And it wasn't until air transportation became a real way of travel that we could go. Even in the early days of flying, the Pan American Clippers took a long time. They took seventeen to twenty-one hours to fly between San Francisco and Honolulu, and the fare was fairly expensive--\$365.00 one way as I recall--so most of those trips were business trips. You couldn't afford to vacation at those rates.

It's been a great experience and the Islands have really blossomed. When I came here, the hotels were very limited to the Moana [Hotel] and the Seaside Cottages. Nineteen twenty-seven was the year the Royal [Hawaiian Hotel] opened and it took a long time to interest people in the Royal, because those who were returning by ship and had been here before wanted to stay at the Moana where they'd honeymooned earlier or had been on some very special occasion. They wanted to go back to where they'd stayed the first time.

M: The Royal Hawaiian was originally . . .

D: Yes, the Royal Hawaiian was downtown off Alakea Street. The new Royal [at its Waikiki location] was opened probably a little bit prematurely and it took them several years to attract people. Then of course, once they got underway, why, they really were very successful. They're still successful. Lot of people want to go back there in pre-

ference to newer hotels.

M: How did you get into newspaper work?

D: I started in Seattle on the Hearst paper there--the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. I actually started as a copyboy, I guess.

M: Was that a long-time ambition of yours, to be in newspapers?

D: No, it's just one of those things that happened. My brother was a printer--my older brother--so I just wanted to work there. I used to go in and visit him. But I started working there when I was going to school--high school. I was a copyboy, then I started doing circulation work and classified counter work--just general all-around newspapering except newswriting which I'd never done. But the business side I learned pretty thoroughly. When I came here I continued the business side and have always been on the business side.

M: Did you come down to Hawaii with a job lined up?

D: Yes I did.

M: How did you get that?

D: Well, it was a very unusual thing. Riley Allen was editor of the Star-Bulletin then, and sort of the manager as well. And he wrote to my boss in Seattle saying that they were looking for a young classified man. So Charlie Horn, who was my boss at that time, was being transferred to New York with the Hearst organization. But before he left he told me about this letter and he said, "Porter, I think you ought to take that job." So I did, and it was quite a move because I'd never really been away from home, but it's a move I've always enjoyed. (chuckles)

M: Did you come by ship?

D: Yes, I came on the old Niagara out of Vancouver. I went up on the train from Seattle to Vancouver, then I came down on the Canadian-Australasian line.

M: Oh. Why did you do that?

D: Well, the only ships out of Seattle were--sailings were infrequent--and they were combination freighters and passenger ships. Looking back on it, the reason I probably went to Vancouver was because it was the first sailing for Ha-

waii. And I was seasick all the way.

M: You weren't married then?

D: No, I wasn't married. I'd never been on a big boat before and I was seasick most of the way. (Lynda laughs) Fortunately . . . (recorder turned off and on again)

M: So you just sort of moved into your job here without . . .

D: Yes, I sort of grew up with it really, 'cause they had very little classified business in those days.

M: Were you in charge of it?

D: Well, if you can say "in charge of it." There were only two of us involved (Lynda laughs), a young lady and myself, so between the two of us we handled it. I think we were successful in building it, and I'm sure we were, because it grew pretty well. We were doing business primarily with real estate people in those days and some automobile and used car business but otherwise, we were pretty much dependent on people bringing ads in and stuff of that kind.

M: Was it a big source of revenue for the paper? It definitely must not have been, huh?

D: No, it wasn't. Classified advertising was not well-developed then, because there were very few. Classified, as you know, is made up primarily of help-wanted ads, rentals, real estate and used cars. There were only one or two of those that were active at all. There were very few jobs available and people at that time weren't moving around. They were pretty static and they didn't sell furniture and things of that kind. So we were pretty dependent on [the] sale of real estate and maybe used cars and other types of advertising. It finally grew. I would guess that some days we wouldn't run more than fifty ads, which wouldn't be very many over a year's time. This year, for example, we ran over a million.

M: How did you like Honolulu when you first came?

D: Well I was lonesome at first, being away from home for the first time, but I soon made friends on the paper. And, like all young people at that time, I rented a room in Waikiki and lived there.

M: In a private home, then?

D: Yes, in a private home, and lived there for at least two

or three years. And I found a lot of friends out there.

On twenty-five dollars a week you can't do very much (both chuckle) more than eat regularly and a few things. Prices were very reasonable. You could have a good time. You could even go to the Royal for a couple of dollars--have dinner, eat a lot of hot pupus (Lynda laughs), and have a drink or something. It was a great experience because we got to know all the beachboys. There was a lot of swimming and surfing--things of that kind--that didn't cost any money. So it was a great place to grow up.

There were always friends coming down. I didn't have a car for the first couple years, but then I got a broken-down Dodge and the way to entertain visitors at that time was to drive them around the island. So we found ourselves going around the island about every weekend. (both laugh) And I'm happy to say I haven't been around . . .

M: What kind of road did you go around the island on then?

D: Hmm?

M: What kind of a road did you have to (phone rings) go around the island?

D: Well, it was a fairly decent road then. It wasn't a highway, but it was a pretty good road. This was our way we entertained people--very simple way. It was a scenic trip and it was pretty much an all-day trip. We'd stop somewhere for lunch. So this was entertaining the wild way in the good old days.

M: (chuckles) Did you surf then?

D: Yes, I surfed and I swam a lot. But that was a long time ago. (Lynda laughs) Now I do less energetic things, like golf.

M: How did you move from the classified ad thing up in the paper?

D: Well, that's a very natural thing in this business. If you're successful in one department, you sort of graduate to another, and another. In my case, I went into the retail department, then from there to national advertising, then I became manager of the whole ad department, and I was for several years. Then I became general manager of the Star-Bulletin.

M: Does that involve--that's the business side of the paper?

D: Yes, all business side, yeah.

M: As opposed to the editing?

D: Right. Now I've never had any editorial experience at all--unqualified for it. (Lynda chuckles) But this is typical of the newspaper business. You can really get into one department. If things turn out well, as they did for me, you move around and gradually increase your responsibilities. That, I'm happy to say, happened in my case. I have lots of luck; I don't attribute it to . . .

M: (laughs) To merit. (laughs)

D: . . . to merit too much. Well, being in the right place at the right time--maybe that has something to do with it.

M: When you first came how many people did the company employ?

D: Very few actually. I would guess less than a hundred.

M: For the printing and the whole bit?

D: Everything, everything. Now in this building we have a thousand people.

One thing I remember was former Governor [Wallace Rider] Farrington, who was governor when I came here. The Star-Bulletin at that time had a circulation of 17,000. This was after I'd been here a couple years. He said one day [to me], "Porter, if we ever make 25,000 [in circulation], we've really got it made." (Lynda laughs) Today we run 174,000 daily and 200,000 or more on Sunday. So times have changed.

M: Can you remember any stories about the people you worked with back in the early days?

D: Well, of course, the greatest . . .

M: Things that happened at work?

D: . . . the greatest newspaperman in Hawaii, in my opinion, was Riley Allen, the gentleman in the picture.

M: I've heard his name but I haven't seen his picture.

D: Yes. He was a long-time editor of the Star-Bulletin. He died about 1962, I guess--'62 or '63. But he was an inspiration: very hard-working, hard-driving person--a good newsman. He typed with two fingers which is something. If you're a typist, you have to go pretty fast to get anywhere with two fingers, but he did. He made a lot of mis-

takes but he always corrected them. (Lynda laughs) But he was really an inspiration to me and I think he kept me working hard. He was full of ideas about what could be done. He used to pass them along and I'd get irritated at times but in the long run I was very pleased that he did it.

M: You mean he could have had not only . . .

D: Well, he took charge of everything, whether he had it or not. I mean he was the editor and normally would not have had supervision of the business office. But he became involved and he was older, so we respected him. And he was such a good editor that we all really fell in line and tried to please him with things he suggested.

M: But he was the editor when you came?

D: Yes, he was the editor when I came.

M: And he retired in '62 or he died in '62?

D: He died in '65 or '66. [Riley H. Allen died October 2, 1966]

M: That was just when I came to Hawaii.

D: I'm not sure of the date now.

M: When did he retire as editor? Before then?

D: Well, he never really retired. Yes, he did too. I'll tell you when he retired. He retired in '62, I think, to become a trustee of the Farrington Estate.

About that time the Star-Bulletin was sold and the trustees took the money they received from the purchase of the Star-Bulletin and made other investments. I think they felt at the time that they could get a better return perhaps from investments than they could from the operation of the newspaper. But Chinn Ho didn't think so. He bought the paper with a hui of people. The Athertons and the Waterhouses were involved and it really turned out very well.

M: Does this change of ownership, like--you've just gone through another sort of thing, haven't you?

D: Yes.

M: Did this really affect the newspaper to a great extent?

D: Actually it didn't affect it too much otherwise. The ori-

ginal purchase by Chinn Ho didn't really change the paper a great deal. The same people were involved. I was involved, for example, and became president when they purchased the paper, for a short time.

Then we formed this joint printing operation of the [Honolulu] Advertiser and the Star-Bulletin. And I became president of that joint operating facility and continued as publisher of the Star-Bulletin, because the Star-Bulletin owned the major share of the joint facility. It's been very successful and the reason it's been successful is because you can utilize all your equipment on a twenty-four hour basis. You can use the same trucks and a lot of money-saving things. Instead of having two separate printing plants, we finally consolidated them into one--improved the equipment as a result. It's been a great success really. It isn't peculiar to Hawaii because they have them in twenty-two other cities in the country, including San Francisco, Salt Lake, places such as that. But it's worked out very well.

Riley Allen, I guess, when he died was in his seventies. But he was a very active person and a very important part of Hawaii. He earned the recognition that he's received, and perhaps more than he's received, by being a great editor and a great crusader. He was a friend of Mr. [Gobindram Jhamandas] Watumull's, by the way--a close friend. They were in the Ad Club [Honolulu Advertising Club] together. They called it an ad club but it was actually a civic club. They promoted good things for Hawaii and Honolulu.

M: Did they found that club?

D: I'm not sure if they did or not. The records are very sketchy on that, at least as far as I know. But they used to meet out on the Roof Garden of the [Alexander] Young Hotel downtown. Ad women, and just about everybody, was a member of the Ad Club. But as I say, it really wasn't an ad club. It was sort of a community do-good club, something like that.

M: Could you tell me about how you got involved in some of your other activities, which I don't recall right off-hand, but I've read the article in the book. [Men and Women of Hawaii, 1966 publication]

D: Well, I think most of these things just sort of come along naturally. You would join the [Honolulu] Chamber of Commerce, for example, and you work on committees. Finally they run out of prospects, so they give you a job as president. (Lynda chuckles) And this is just the way it goes. I mean, you become involved. This has happened to me in

two or three other organizations--Rotary [Club] and Navy League--whatever it is. They just run out of prospects and they finally give them a title. "I want you go do more work," or something.

M: Yeh.

D: Now these are all pretty natural things. They were in my case. I never strove to be president of the Chamber [of Commerce], or district governor of the Rotary [Club]. I never even thought about it. It's something that evolved through participation. And a lot of things I haven't been. (phone rings, speech inaudible)

M: (laughs) Yeh. (recorder turned off and on again) . . . that you've worked with over the years?

D: Several of them are gone now, but the people I remember best are the people at the Star-Bulletin. The Farrington family, including the governor and his son, Joe, who's a very close personal friend of mine, as well as a business friend--business associate--and a lot of people that were there. Most of them are gone now because, after all, I'm talking about forty years ago. It's only natural if they were older than I am, they wouldn't be around today. They were a great experience; they were great people.

Honolulu, at that time, was a very small, friendly city. You'd walk up Fort Street and you'd know everyone on the street. This is hard to believe but it was true. You would know everyone in town. People who came in who didn't live here would usually go to Waikiki, so the tourists were separated from the business community. It was just very common for everyone to know and speak to everyone else.

M: Were the offices here?

D: No, our offices were down on Merchant Street, opposite the Castle & Cooke building, which has since gone. ~~The building there now is the new Castle & Cooke building--the towers--where the Bank of Hawaii building is.~~

M: So you were right down in the middle of . . .

D: Right in the middle of town. We were surrounded by the Big Five, as they called them: [Theo. H.] Davies across the street, A & B [Alexander & Baldwin, Inc] next door, Castle & Cooke across the street, C. Brewer [and Company] down a little ways, and the banks were there. Everything was almost in a two-block radius.

There weren't any good restaurants in those days.

M: There weren't?

D: No. If you wanted to entertain someone, you either took them to the Young Hotel or the chop suey restaurant upstairs at the corner of Nuuanu and Hotel Streets--Honolulu Chop Suey House.

M: Those were it, huh?

D: Yes, yes--well, a few saimin stands. But most everyone ate dinner at home in those days. There weren't any restaurants, just--like Curtiss Soda Fountain on Fort Street next to the East India Store, across from Liberty House; Benson-Smith Drug Store which had a soda fountain. There were no chain stores in Honolulu. They were all small stores. I remember when the first one to come in was [S. H.] Kress and even the small merchants would go down there and buy from Kress as they would [from] a wholesaler, because they could take merchandise out and sell it for a profit in their districts, or whatever. And I helped open the first Sears [Roebuck and Company] store on Bere-tania Street. That was back in '41, I guess. Then the war broke out and so things were disrupted for a while, but it [Sears] was a success from the very beginning.

M: That's one thing I wanted to ask you about. How did the war affect the newspaper?

D: The newspaper during the war had quite an unusual experience. We had trouble getting newsprint because the War Production Board had charge of paper, so it was very difficult to get enough paper. I made several trips to Washington to call on the War Production Board and was able to get paper on the basis of making the local papers available to the service people who were going through here. They felt it was a morale factor.

Strangely enough, one time during the war we had a bigger circulation in Honolulu than Los Angeles had, for example. I mean, we were printing and distributing more papers than the big cities on the Coast.

M: Because of the service people?

D: There were just thousands [of service people]. I think at one time in the city there were close to a million troops waiting to join convoys to go west. You literally had to walk down the center of the street. You couldn't get on the sidewalks--they were just loaded with service personnel. This was an unusual period. We carried very little advertising [at that time], but our circulation was the chief source of revenue, which is just the opposite of

normal operations.

M: Did you have difficulty getting communications, getting the news?

D: No, news seemed to be coming through pretty well. It was censored. We had censors in our office to review the files coming in and restrict some of them, but eventually they let us do the censoring. They told us what they were watching [for] and we could do it just as well, perhaps better. It was a lot less delay getting it in print. It was quite an interesting time.

END OF SIDE 1/1ST TAPE

D: [Riley Allen] didn't keep regular hours. He'd work from early morning till late at night. And on Saturdays and Sundays he'd be down there [at the office]. And he was . . .

M: All the time, you mean?

D: Yes. Well, it was his hobby as well as his profession. So he was at work that morning [December 7, 1941] and he got out the extra almost single-handed. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. He was there. He called the crew down there, very small crew. (laughter) He did all the writing; it was just getting somebody to print the paper, but he did. He would do these things under great stress, you know; didn't bother him any. He went right through whatever he was doing, found ways to do it even if it seemed impossible. So it was good training.

M: Yeh. How did you meet your wife? "Cause I remember she was born on the mainland, too. Did she come down or . . .

D: Yes. I think she was on a round-the-world trip really and stayed over to visit some friends here. I met her in 1930 and we were married that same year. She's from Boston and had friends living here.

M: I forgot to ask you. What did you major in in college?

D: I didn't. I took advertising. I never graduated from college, so I didn't get a degree. I was studying advertising at the University of Washington, but unfortunately never graduated. I came to Honolulu and never got back. But I'm just as happy now--worked out all right.

M: I just thought maybe you were in journalism or something.

D: No, I went to school in Seattle and attended the University

of Washington but never graduated.

M: Can you think of any other incidents, interesting people?

D: There should be some. Well, I've met a lot of interesting people. I met Presidents [of the United States] who came out here and most of the military people, including [General George Smith] Patton when he was stationed out at [Fort] Shafter with his polo ponies.

M: Patton had polo ponies?

D: General Patton. Oh yes. He was very wealthy and he brought his own polo ponies out and kept them here.

M: At his own expense or something?

D: Yes.

M: Wow.

D: He was a very controversial person. I never knew him well but I visited him several times at Shafter.

M: What was your impression of him?

D: He was a very--he had very definite ideas about things. He was a very aggressive person. I never saw the film "Patton." I wish I had; people said it was very good. I don't think he was too popular with his fellow officers at the time, simply because he was so much better off, probably, than they. (both chuckle)

M: I didn't know that he had, independently . . .

D: Oh yes. He was independently wealthy; and a great polo player and a great, real hard, gung-ho type.

M: [Who] are some of the Presidents that you've met?

D: Well, I met [Franklin D.] Roosevelt and [Dwight D.] Eisenhower and, let's see now. I've met--I met a couple of them in Seattle. The first one I met was President [Woodrow] Wilson. This was a long time ago. That was when I was a youngster in Seattle. And I met [Warren G.] Harding just before he died. Then I've met [Calvin] Coolidge, and I attended press conferences in Washington [D. C.] with [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, and . . .

M: That was after you were here.

D: Yes. That was after I was here. And I met--what's his name--the haberdasher?

M: Harry Truman?

D: Truman. I met Truman and Bess [his wife] and that was in some official capacity. I had to take leis to them on board the . . .

M: When they came here.

D: . . . one of the President's boats. Bess wore hers but Harry wouldn't permit a lei around his neck. (both chuckle) And in recent years I've attended press conferences in Washington.

M: How was . . .

D: And not as a working journalist. Just being invited to attend.

M: Oh, I see. Is that how you got to be at Roosevelt's--how did you happen to attend Roosevelt's press conference? Were you . . .

D: I was in Washington and our correspondent there invited me . . .

M: Oh, I see.

D: . . . or made arrangements for me to attend. That's the way I attended the others. I wasn't taking notes or anything. But I enjoyed them. It was very interesting.

Well, a lot of things happen in the newspaper business. You have access to things you wouldn't have otherwise maybe: trips aboard navy ships and aircraft and things that the average person doesn't really get to do, simply because you're [with] a newspaper. It's primarily for the news people, but sometimes they forget about that (both chuckle)--invite a publisher or somebody else.

I'm wandering all over the place. I don't know whether I'm giving you anything that you want.

M: Yeh, you are. Uh huh.

D: You turn me back on to the right direction if you want.

M: No, I just. . . . I think the trouble with this is that people think that I want something earth-shaking you know, and I don't. I just want this sort of simple, little, funny or peculiar things out of the past, you know, that peo-

ple don't experience anymore because things have changed; life is different now.

D: No, life is different. I'm sure you've heard that the dress of the day was a linen suit--white linen suit--and if you wore a hat, which I never did, it was always a Panama hat. And most of these came from McNerny or the Hub and later Andrade, which started on Fort Street. But this was the typical wear and we all wore white linen suits which were washed instead of dry cleaned. They were really pretty good-looking suits and they didn't cost very much--twenty or twenty-five dollars.

And laundry was very inexpensive in those days. We didn't wear aloha shirts; we wore regular shirts. Everything that you wore went to the laundry, usually to one of the Japanese women who did laundry in those days. (phone rings) We all had our own laundry woman, so it was a . . .

M: That seems so strange.

D: Yes, right. We never sent things to the laundry, really. There were so many laundry women around who did cleaning or laundry.

They sold flowers all over the city and all over Waikiki--big baskets with flowers in them. And [they'd] walk along yelling, "Flowers." This is the way people bought most of their flowers.

There were a lot of things. Chinatown was a very interesting place in those days, not too unlike it is today.

M: Cleaner maybe.

D: Yes (chuckles), I think it was. The [thousand-year old duck] eggs were just as old, though. (both laugh) As a matter of fact, my wife worked for [G. J.] Watumull in the East India Store for a few years when we were first married.

M: That was an importing firm, huh?

D: Yes.

M: It's not there anymore, is it?

D: No. I think they own a couple of stores but they're not the stores they had--completely different. This featured mostly Indian merchandise.

M: Was there quite a demand for it?

D: Well, he had a fairly large store as I recall and they did

a pretty good business. He had a lot of imported things from India, plus some other types of merchandise. He had quite--I mean, I'm not sure just what percentage and such--but I know that he had a lot of grass things from India and things that would appeal to visitors.

M: Where did people go to buy just ordinary, everyday--like food and . . .

D: Well, they had a market right on Fort Street, next door to Liberty House, called Day's Market. They had a lot of small Japanese or Chinese stores all around, any neighborhood you went into. No supermarkets, but stores--little grocery stores. And I remember the butcher shop sold beef for twenty-five cents a pound and you could get any cut. You could have the choice cuts or round steak or whatever and it would be the same price.

M: Really?

D: Yes. The meat wasn't aged too well. It was fairly fresh beef, but there was no difference in price between the good and the poor cuts.

M: So of course everybody would take the good cuts and then . . .

D: Well, no they didn't because--well, they had different reasons for buying different cuts. But if you knew meat, why, you'd get the good cuts. And if you didn't, why--[they] probably used round steak for sukiyaki or whatever.

M: Money must have gone a lot farther. (laughs)

D: Yes. Quite a change from now, price-wise.

M: I was looking at a steak yesterday in the store and it was \$2.39 a pound!

D: Sure.

M: And it had a big bone in it, to boot.

D: Prices have certainly changed. A dollar isn't what it was two years ago.

M: Where did you live after you were married?

D: Well, we started out in Waikiki, then moved to a couple of places in Waikiki, then to the Makiki area. And finally ended up Manoa Valley till a couple years ago, and then we

went into an apartment. We always had help. Finally our long-time maid--she and her husband lived with us--died. And after a year or two we decided that we should find an apartment and give up trying to keep up the house--a very sizable house with a big yard.

M: This was up in Manoa.

D: Manoa, yes. We like apartment-living. It's the only way to fly if you don't have any children to worry about.

M: Yeh, it must be a relief after years and years of picking up a big house.

D: Right. I'm not about to do yard work, or learn. (chuckles)

M: Yeh.

D: Well, it's been a great experience, though. I've thoroughly enjoyed every moment in Hawaii.

M: I wanted to ask you when you mentioned your Japanese couple who lived with you . . .

D: Yes?

M: . . . took care of things. Was that the usual arrangement?

D: Yes, pretty general. I have one experience I've told many times. The morning after Pearl Harbor--that Sunday was a pretty rugged Sunday, you know--the lights were all out: blackout. This couple had a little daughter and they were very concerned about the situation and so they came upstairs--they lived down below in apartment-type quarters--the next morning, which was Monday morning, and they said, "Mr. Dickinson, what's going to happen to us if the Japanese take over?"--which we thought they might. In fact, everybody was a little concerned about it. And I said, "Well, if they take over, why, you move upstairs and we'll move downstairs." (Lynda laughs) And this is a very silly answer, but it solved that concern that they had. I mean, they were really concerned; everyone was concerned. They didn't know what was going to happen next, and things had happened. But this satisfied them. It was a very simple answer--it didn't mean anything--but it was sort of humorous afterwards and it calmed their concern about what was going to happen. None of us knew what was going to happen either but we kept busy, building bomb shelters and things like that.

M: Did you have to pay live-in servants like that, in addition to . . .

D: Yes. Oh yes, you payed them. But they were very available then, you know. You could get them without too much problem. We originally hired--she was married after she started working for us, but she was with us thirty years or over and raised her family. So it was a way of life and it was a great way of life. I think my wife thought more of her than--well, we all did--than some of our close relatives really, because we were close and she [my wife] was closer to her than she would have been to family if they were here. They just didn't happen to be here. They were our family and considered as such.

This woman, who was priceless, did more than her share for service people during the war. We had a lot of them at the house--you know, friends, or sons and daughters of friends on the mainland--and they would come up and spend the night there. She'd cook for them and do their laundry and all that sort of thing. It was very touching. And they all thought a great deal of her, especially those who came back--you know, not necessarily lost but the ones who came through here again.

Living has changed quite a bit and I'm sure for the better but, anyway, there were a lot of nice things about the old days. We forget about the centipedes and mosquitoes which we had in great numbers--scorpions and things of that kind. But they've disappeared now.

M: They've thinned out considerably. I've never seen a scorpion yet, and my husband's told me all kinds of stories about his childhood.

D: Oh, well I can remember walking in Waikiki on a moonlight night and the centipedes--these long centipedes--would be crawling across the street and they were all over. They had to get into homes. And I've been swimming over at Kailua where the mosquitoes were so thick you could brush them aside with a sweep of the hand. So Hawaii had improved a great deal in many, many ways.

M: Just from everything I've heard and people that I've talked to, it seems like it was a very comfortable place to live really.

D: Oh, thank you. (woman enters to remind him of the time)
Yeah, I have an appointment downtown at four, so if you'll excuse me. (Counter at 298)

END OF INTERVIEW

Re-transcribed and edited by Linda I. L. Tubbs

Audited and edited by Katherine B. Allen

Edited by Porter L. Dickenson, 1980

Subject Index

- 1 Family background: Dickinson-Raus
 Michael Hall and Emma Raus Dickinson
 1927 employment: Honolulu Star-Bulletin
- 2 Early transportation and travel
 Moana Hotel, Seaside Cottages and
 The Royal Hawaiian Hotel
- 3 Employment history
- 4 Classified advertising, 1927 and 1971
- 5 Around-the-island tours
 Moving up in the news business
- 6 Growth of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin
 Governor Wallace Rider Farrington
 Riley H. Allen, editor
- 7 Riley H. Allen, Farrington Estate trustee
 Chinn Ho buys the Honolulu Star-Bulletin
 The Athertons and the Waterhouses
- 8 Honolulu Star-Bulletin joins the
 Honolulu Advertiser
 Gobindram Jhamandas Watumull
 Honolulu Advertising Club
 Mr. Dickinson's affiliations
- 9 The W. R. Farrington family

- 9 Downtown Honolulu in the old days
 The Big Five locations
- 10 Young Hotel; Honolulu Chop Suey House
 S. H. Kress: first chain store
 Sears Roebuck and Company
 Effects of WW II on the newspaper business
- 11 Riley H. Allen, December 7, 1941
 Mr. and Mrs. L. Porter Dickinson
 Mr. Dickinson's education
- 12 General George S. Patton
 Presidents Wilson, Harding, Coolidge,
 Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower
- 13 Harry and Bess Truman in Hawaii
 Washington press conferences
- 14 White linen suits and Panama hats
 Laundry women and flower vendors
 G. J. Watumull's East India Store
- 15 Day's Market; beef prices
 The Dickinsons' residences
- 16 Anecdote: Japanese servants, WW II
- 17 Anecdote: servants and service people
 Centipedes and mosquitoes in Hawaii

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.